THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHRIRAM CHAUHAN): (a) to (d) The Government has been taking various steps from time to time to improve the health of the sugar industry. In this regard, the following steps have been taken:—

1. The levy obligation of sugar mills which was reduced from 40% to 20% w.e.f. 1-1-2000, was further reduced to 15% w.e.f. 1-2-2001

2. To restrict inflow of imported sugar in the country, custom duty has been increased to 60% w.e.f. 9.2.2000. The imported sugar has been brought under the release mechanism.

3. Advanced releases of freesale sugar are being given to needy sugar mills to enable them to clear cane price dues of the farmers.

4. Monthly releases of freesale sugar are being made judiciously to ensure fair realization to sugar industry.

5. Export of 10 lakh tonnes of sugar has been permitted in the licensing year 2000-2001 (April-March).

6. The Government is considering to amending the Sugar Development Fund Rules, 1983 to help sugar mills to take up bagasse based cogeneration of power and for providing financial assistance at concessional rates of interest to potentially viable sick sugar mills.

Foodgrain Policy

3643. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether any foodgrain policy is being formulated keeping in view of removing import barrier for agro products;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any fresh incentives would be given to the farmers under this policy; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHRIRAM CHAUHAN): (a) to (d) No, Sir. However, a High Level Committee has been constituted to formulate a Long Term Grain Policy. The Terms of Reference of the said Committee include matters relating to Minimum Support Price and price support operations, functioning of Public Distribution System policy regarding buffer stocks. Open Market Intervention and Export/Import, allocation of foodgrains for rural development programmes and other welfare programmes and FCI related issues. The Committee is expected to finalise its report by May, 2001.

Improvement of PDS in Himachal Pradesh

3644. SHRI ANIL SHARMA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to take necessary steps to improve Public Distribution System in Himachal Pradesh specially in far flung hilly and snow bound areas; and

(b) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHRIRAM CHAUHAN): (a) and (b) Under the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Central Government has assumed responsibility for procurement and supply of essential commodities *viz.* wheat, rice, levy sugar, imported edible oils and kerosene upto the designated depots for further distribution by the State Governments to the consumers.

Under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) the State Government is distributing 10 kg. of rice and 10 kg. of wheat per BPL family per month. As reported by the Government of Himachal Pradesh, the State Government is also providing wheat atta in lieu of wheat under the TPDS per the choice of the consumers.

The distribution of essential commodities to the consumers is being made through a network of 3935 fair price shops, out of which 184